Louisiana Asks $12 Million in U.S. Funds

By EDGAR POE

WASHINGTON — The Atchafalaya River Basin Floodway in Louisiana is the foremost important main stem of the Mississippi River and tributaries remaining to be completed, the Louisiana Department of Public Works has advised Congress.

In statements pending before the House and Senate Appropriations Committee Tuesday, the state agency said the floodway is 47 per cent complete. Although it was authorized by Congress in 1928, it is not expected to be completed until sometime after 1990. Louisiana is asking $12,500,000 of federal assistance funds for the coming year.

Completion of the floodway is of marked importance to the parishes of Avoyelles, Pointe Coupee, St. Landry, Iberville, Iberia, St. Martin, St. Mary and Terrebonne, and the Greater New Orleans area is vitally interested in its completion. Nearly a third of the state's population lives in the New Orleans area.

The Mississippi River below Old River, a six-mile section of an old bend of the Mississippi, 120 air miles northwest of New Orleans and 217 miles by the meandering river, is capable of carrying only 1,500,000 cubic feet of water per second without threatening the levees in the Greater New Orleans area. In a super flood in the lower Mississippi, engineers would divert another 1,500,000 cubic feet per second through the Old River control (turn it on and off somewhat like a spigot) and the Atchafalaya River and through the Atchafalaya floodways.

The Atchafalaya River is a mighty distributary stream on a shorter route to the Gulf of Mexico past Morgan City. Engineers vow that if the control structure in Old River had not been constructed several years ago, the Atchafalaya River could have captured the main stem of the Mississippi by 1971. The Mississippi has changed its course several times in the past 2,000 years, according to engineers and geologists.

Had the Atchafalaya captured the main stem, New Orleans would have been left on a great salt water lagoon and this would have created a series of major problems including the finding of a new fresh water supply. But the control structure took care of that.

“Annual monies are barely enough to satisfy cost increases and to struggle to maintain the project status of the present completion level,” said the Louisiana Department of Works in its report submitted by assistant director Hu B. Myers. “In 1961 the benefit-cost ratio was 7.3 to 1, and now is an astounding 15.2 to 1. Therefore, the Department of Public Works urges progressive and orderly completion of this project before 1990, almost 20 years from now. Based on the present project cost remaining to be funded, annual appropriations should be in excess of the $12,500,000 amount requested in fiscal year 1972.”